

MARQUEE

Alive, in the shadow of Goliath



Seven hundred copies of the *Rajasthani anthology* awarded by Sahitya Akademi this year were sold off as scrap. Is this peculiar to the languages left out of the Eighth Schedule? Nibhat Kazmi asks the awardees

end up as paper bags, to hold your vegetables in!

But who is to blame for this? Who must be held accountable? Not the writer who writes against all odds — falling readership disappearing publishers, a marginalised literary movement, non-functional state patronage and the hegemony of Hindi and English. Nor the Sahitya Akademi which strongly reflects constitutional egalitarianism in its unstinted approval of 22 Indian languages. Something which the Constitution itself denies in its Eighth Schedule. States I.N. Choudhary, the Akademi's secretary: "Sahitya Akademi does its best to impress on the consciousness of the reading public that Indian literature, no matter which language it is written in, is the common heritage of all our people, and Sahitya Akademi is the Akademi of all the writers in this country dedicated to the creation of Indian literature. The fact is reflected in its annual dispensation where languages that are not yet in the Eighth Schedule co-exist with bigger, better protected, state promoted languages, even if in their shadow. These are the little Davids that dream of reaching Goliath's stature — if only the government would listen, if only it would care."

Hindi mari dadi ae, Te Dogri ae ma, Dadi jhar dadi ae, Te ma thiye ma (If Hindi is our grandmother, then Dogri is our mother, Grandmothers have their own place and mothers all their own. Quotes Mohan Singh, the Dogri writer who won the award for his collection of plays, *Apni Dakhli Anna*. Rag Mohan Singh smiles at the award and yet furrows up his brow in pain. "If all the citizens of this country are equal, then why aren't the languages spoken by the citizens equal too? As long as there is this *bhed-bhav* (distinction), writers like me will continue to be leaden-hearted despite the awards."

Dogri today boasts of many literateurs: Madhukar, Padma Sachdev, Narendra Rajwara. Yet, when it comes to publishing, all these writers have to dig into their personal savings in order to reach out to the reader. This is a

other, uglier side. The Jammu State Akademi, according to Mohan Singh, should be concentrating all its promotional activities on the uplift of Dogri since cultural promotion in Kashmir is impossible now. But the Akademi is dormant. *Uska nahin toh ka kyon* (if not for Kashmiri then why for Dogri), this seems to be their motto," he explains.

"What do we do?" the playwright queries. "If we protest, we are labelled anti-Kashmiri. Our legitimate movement is viewed as a threat to national integrity. All we demand is the inclusion of Dogri in the Eighth schedule. After all, why are we not included and why are those that are there?"

Similar queries exercise writers of all languages that do not enjoy constitutional recognition. Queries that refuse to be quelled by awards, contained by certificates or covered with souvenir shawls. Instead they threaten to blow into storms of discontent. "No, we are not willing to give up this demand," stresses Prof. Ramdeo, "though we do not want to reach a situation akin to Punjab, Kashmir, Assam. No, we shall merely argue and request. But will such peaceful measures continue with the younger generation? They are more fiery, more aggressive, and extremely angry..."

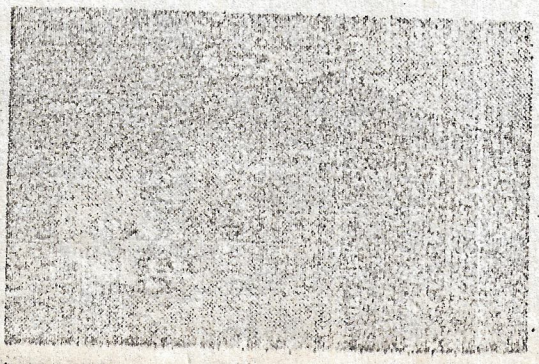
Do we hear the alarm bells ring? Can we dream of unity in true and total diversity? Or must we rest with lopsided anachronisms where certain languages are — to quote Premji Prem — "languages of the Sahitya Akademi but not of the Indian constitution."



Premji Prem

conscious loss of freedom." For state patronage, he says, may result in "the arrest and deportation of many more Solzhenitsyns."

Even the degree and nature of state patronage is held suspect by awardees. And with good reason. It is mandatory for state Akademis to purchase a few copies of the awarded books. But the Rajasthani State Akademi library has yet to include the book it awarded him for in 1982 informs Premji Prem. And for his recent book, the Akademi doled out a paltry Rs. 3000. Meena Kakodkar had written



Ramdeo Jha

poems, *Brahmputra Hyadi Padya* and bemoans, "it is a pity that winning cash prizes is a necessity for one writing in languages like Assamese, for the number of readers is very small."

Small wonder then that publishers are reluctant to publish his verse. The prize money will help him to recover part of the expenses he incurred, he says, feeling indebted to the Akademi. This when he has always been opposed to state patronage of culture. "I had wanted to the state, and gratefulness — especially in a per-



Mohan Singh

crunch shared by writers in almost all the languages left out of the Eighth schedule. Mohan Singh (Dogri) spent Rs.12,000 to get his book published. Ramdeo Jha (Maithili) too had to publish his own book, *Padi jhatia Pahari*. Meena Kakodkar

focuses attention on the abysmal lack of publishers and outlets in Konkani, while Premji Prem (Rajasthani) spent Rs. 650 for *Mhari Kavitation*. Ajit Barua (Assamese) who writes in order to purify the dialect of his tribe, "accepts the Rs.25,000 award proffered by the Akademi for his collection of